



## Sustaining Support

\$192,000 in gifts to our #Flystrong Emergency Fundraising Campaign ensured necessary funding to create and provide 4 months of virtual programming and activities at NO COST to thousands of members without access to the critical services provided by schools in the early months of the pandemic



## Valuable Learning

Your donations allowed us to reopen slowly and safely, and provide valued learning to 647 people with autism since summer 2020 –

in-person where safe and comfortable, and virtually for those who prefer or need to remain off-site



## 200+ New Members

AutismUp's ability to reach and engage families through new virtual programs and outreach efforts means more families are getting the support they need. Our membership has grown to over 2700 families.

**Welcome!**

We're Glad You're Here



## Free Family Support

Thanks to your donations, over 1000 families received support and information through 92 (virtual) parent meet-ups and workshops, daily individual consultations, and a 24x7 online parent/guardian support, all at *no cost to families.*

## Support as One Grows Up

Your generosity allowed AutismUp to launch the virtual Center for Community Transition, and its foundational program, Full Life Academy. 18 participants ages 17-26 participated in 2020.

This center will provide a pathway to those growing up and transitioning to adulthood, helping them build individualized life plans and independence skills, and explore vocational opportunities. Expansion of this program is a major focus for 2021.



## Mutual Aid Collaborations

Your support in good and dollars created boxes of needed supplies for 75 families, install and stock a food cupboard, and conduct 10 racial equity trainings with our partner, the Golisano Autism Center.

*Examples of the impact your donations had on AutismUp families in 2020.*

*Shared with permission, names changed for privacy, edited for clarity and space.*

## *A Place Where He Can Be Himself*

You have made a huge impact in our family. My son runs into AutismUp 3 days a week with excitement and doesn't even care to say good-bye before meeting up with "his buddies" which include both friends and staff. **He has finally found a place where he can be just him.** He has always had to act the way he is expected to and not how his body acts. This is so important because now that Reggie has found a place he can act himself, he doesn't have to hold everything inside and let the release button go off once home. He is learning what his body needs for movement and sensory to maintain appropriate self-regulation. **This has led to less behaviors at home, more improvements with self-control, self-awareness, and overall just a happier kid.** Reggie has really missed going to AutismUp during the COVID PAUSE, but AutismUp has offered so many amazing programs via the internet that have helped Reggie stay connected.

## *New Activities and Routines During COVID*

Adjusting to new routines during the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted all of us. Imagine being a person on the Autism spectrum who already struggles on a daily basis with change, who thrives on routine and consistency - routine and consistency that has taken years to develop with his treatment team – to suddenly have it ripped away. As a parent to a 13 year old on the Autism Spectrum who is also diagnosed with ADHD and several learning disorders, I scrambled to quickly develop a structured routine to encompass his educational and sensory needs. **I instantly became a teacher, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, and Social Worker - and was terrified!**

**AutismUp's "The Weekly Breeze" has been a welcome resource.** It promotes a variety of fun and engaging sensory and educational based activities for people of all ages, and offers family and caretakers help and support through virtual meet-ups and family navigation services.

My son and daughter both enjoy the variety of activities offered through Autism-Up. Craig Jones, AutismUp Program Director, has also personally reached out to check in on us as we continue our voyage through this pandemic. My family and I are blessed to have Autism-Up as part of our support team.

## *Supporting the Parent* (provided by Family Navigator with permission)

One mom contacted AutismUp looking for programs for her young daughter. The mother was about to initiate a divorce from her verbally abusive husband and she second-guessed herself at every turn.

Through the AutismUp parent meet-ups she was able to connect with other parents who had gone through similar situations. In Parent Meet-ups, parents and caregivers can unload, unpack, and examine what is going on in their homes. We have seen how the shared experience aids in building relationships between families.

We were able to encourage the mother and give her guidance as she learned to navigate social systems and learned to better support her daughter. We provided a safe place for mom to work through her doubts and uncertainties. Over the course of the year **she has become an amazing advocate for her daughter and has become a more confident mother.** She has made a friend and they connect outside the group as well. This mom told us **she would not have been able to make these tough decisions without her AutismUp family's love and support.**

### *The Smile on His Face*

AutismUp has been an important part of our family's life for the last 5 years. Our son, Owen, has participated in Boys Club, Soccer, Basketball, Open Gym, iCan Bike, and the Summer Social Skills program at the YMCA. We've also attended several family events at AutismUp, including Trunk or Treat and Cookies & Cocoa with Santa. One of our favorites memories is Owen's first visit with Santa, which happened at AutismUp. He had been so interested in Santa, but he was also very apprehensive about talking with him. AutismUp provided an understanding and patient environment that allowed Owen to feel comfortable.

When school closed in March due to covid-19, Owen was struggling emotionally as he was really missing social interaction with his peers. Then he started attending the weekly virtual social meet-ups and remote Minecraft sessions facilitated by AutismUp. **It was so wonderful to see the big smile on his face after the first session of both.** Owen looks forward to these each week, and continues to share how happy he is and how much fun he just had after each session. They keep him engaged with others and provide him with an opportunity to practice social skills.

AutismUp has opened up opportunities for our son that he wouldn't have had otherwise. Being able to play sports with his peers (at AutismUp) is something so important to Owen. All of the coaches and staff have always been incredibly supportive and patient. The iCan Bike program did so much more than teach him how to ride a bike. Owen also gained confidence and a sense of independence. He has been riding his bike quite a bit during the shutdown, which has been a great source of exercise and stress reduction for him. AutismUp provides Owen with a comfortable and safe place where he can be himself. We are so grateful for the service and support that AutismUp provides and look forward to continuing programs at AutismUp in the future.

*Thank you for helping families with autism #flystrong in 2020*